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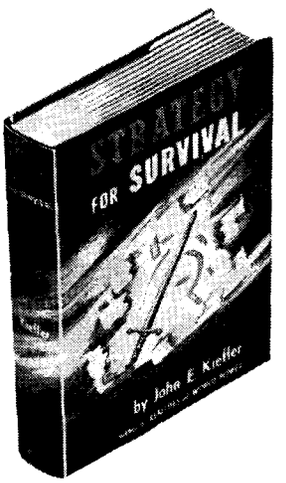

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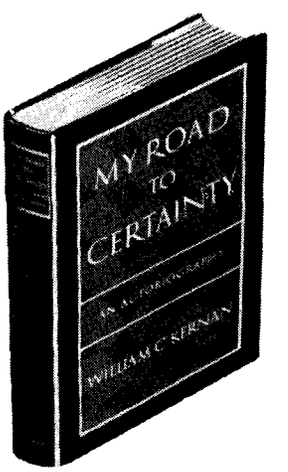

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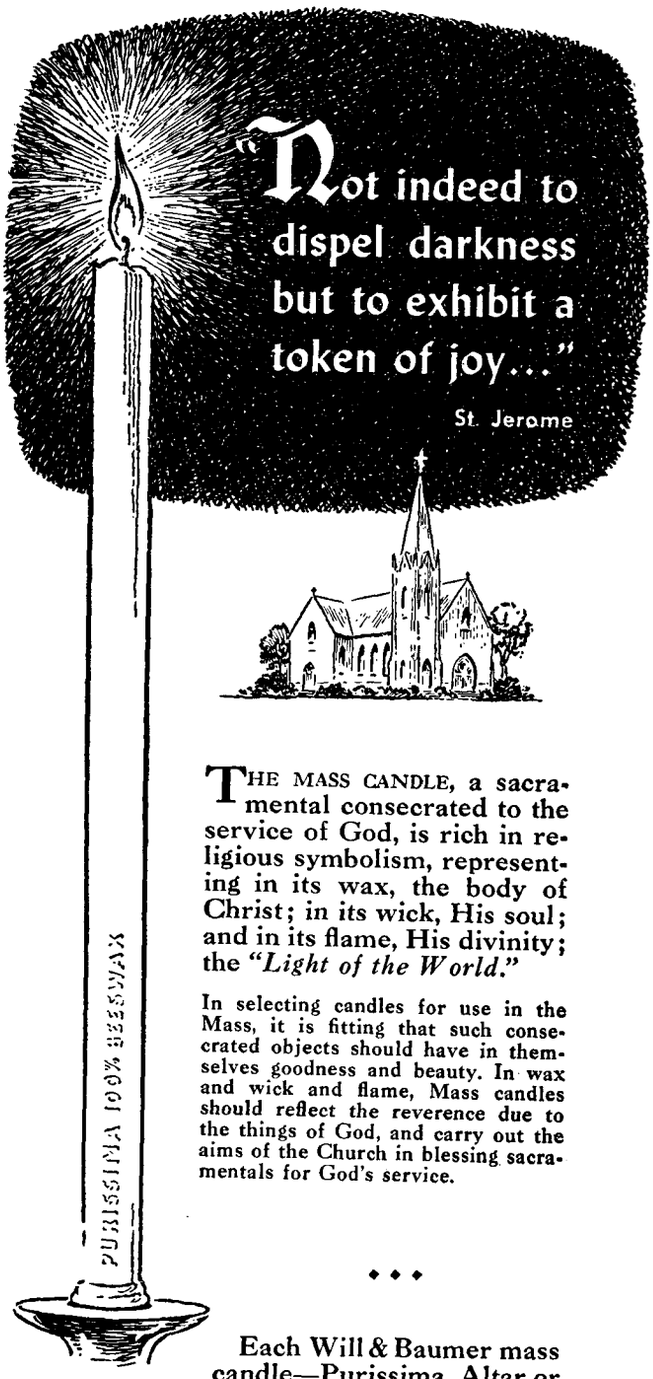

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THE Commonweal

week by week

CONTRASTS IN SEGREGATION

IN recent years Americans have enjoyed some sardonic satisfaction over certain difficulties European nations have been confronting in their colonies. For here was one matter on which our own record was comparatively good. As the cold war proceeded, satisfaction gave way somewhat to chagrin since colonial difficulties were weakening our principal allies. Up to now Asia and Oceania have been the main scene of these struggles, but Africa, too, is now forging to the front.

The victory last month of Dr. Malan's South African Nationalists on a racial platform has, more than any other single event, brought nearer a widespread native rising in Africa and jeopardizes what progress in civilizing has been made there in the last hundred years—largely under missionary impetus. But aside from its relationship to our general fortunes, there are many aspects of the battle for *apartheid,* or segregation, which make the South African situation seem tremendously remote. Current interest in the Dark Continent, as evinced by special issues of *Life* magazine and the *Saturday Review,* tend to underline such elements as the strange, the foreign and the distant which ever exercise a human fascination.

Alan Paton, author of *Cry, the Beloved Country,* for instance, makes much of the Great Trek of 1836, in which the Boers pulled up stakes wholesale and marched a thousand miles northward to settle where they could preserve a way of life uncorrupted by British ideas of "some kind of equality between white and black." The fierceness with which these Afrikaners of Dutch origin withstood the mighty British in the Boer War sixty years later gave further evidence of the vehemence of their beliefs. The fact that their patriarchal mode of existence, with the native in complete subjection, was welded to the most sincere religious sentiments of a strong Old Testament cast only made the Boers stiffer adversaries. It gives the Malan Nationalists much of their inner force today.

Last month's elections in a sense brought the vanquished of the Boer War back to power in South Africa. Dr. Malan has shown little aversion even to the idea of secession from the British Commonwealth if developments should impel him and his people in that direction; a Boer republic is not clearly barred from his calculations.

Except that all this provokes marked repercussions among the natives in the Union of South Africa and throughout the African Continent, the Malan pattern supplies something new in the way of racial strife. For whereas in other areas Europeans have been striving to hold onto a relationship long established, the Malan regime is bent on such things as disenfranchisement of the few natives who do now have the vote and a degree of *apartheid* or separation beyond what is now in force between the two races.

THUS on the mysterious continent of Africa a new drama is unfolding that seems certain to lead eventually to the most dire results. The prospect encompasses a terrible war between the races—with those held in poverty, subjection and ignorance going berserk. Many of the relatively few natives who have secured an education would lead their oppressed people to Communism itself.

It is all too easy smugly to contrast this folly of the Boers with the strides we are making in this country on interracial relations. The current annual report of the National Urban League, for example, supplies some basis for a comparison. It notes an increasing interest on the part of Americans of every station in the well-being of the Negro. The League also signalizes the notable advances for the American Negro in the past year in such fields as types of employment, housing, health and education. Since the war the change has indeed been marked.

To judge from these advances—and from the contrasting directions in the United States and South Africa on racial matters—that all is well in the matter of interracial justice in this country is premature, to put it mildly. To view it simply as a problem in

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our South is likewise unwarranted. For despite the real strides we are making in all sections of our land, among Europeans and Asiatics alike the status of the American Negro is still the most telling argument against the United States.

THE BRAINWASHED

EVEN as a word "brainwashing" is misjoined and ugly, and as a fact it is terrifying. But it is the monster-child of totalitarianism, and as such comprehensible, and a warning. The human personality, the totalitarians have taught us, can be breached. A man who is exhausted and hungry, who is subjected to extreme discomfort, and then questioned, argued with, patiently and skillfully, can without overt torture be brought to say and even believe things he had once known to be false.

Many Americans who were prisoners of the Communists were subjected to this treatment. Some may have succumbed, if succumb is the right word for an experience, the volition of which is singular and obscure. So? So we "de-brainwash" them, said someone in the Army or Air Force.

The ex-prisoners who arrived at Valley Forge Army Hospital last week acquired the title somewhere along the line. They were the de-brainwashees. The press, which has rarely been more irresponsible than in its treatment of the prisoner exchange, spread the news, and then after the ex-prisoners held their rightfully bitter press conference, admitted with some shame that it wasn't so. The hospital's chief psychiatrist was quoted as saying that he was then in no position to determine whether the patients possessed a "red tinge."

It would seem that this sorry episode can be blamed on publicity rather than on principle. It would seem incredible that Army or Air Force medical authorities planned for *any* ex-prisoner any more than good care, medical treatment, rest, and if his imprisonment had caused in him extreme depression or other mental difficulty, the necessary psychiatric treatment. That is not de-brainwashing.

But publicity on the affair spoke as if a man who gave the Chinese credit for decent treatment had a "red tinge." Publicity overlooked the fact that men who have been imprisoned for months and years with the New York and London *Daily Workers* their reading matter might not have a wholly balanced view of recent events. Publicity overlooked the fact that it is a rather profound tradition in America to respect the privacy, the opinions, the mistakes of individuals. Publicity revealed its own uncertainties by substituting de-brainwashing for healing rest and the atmosphere of freedom.

We have been talking a lot about psychological warfare recently, and here some of us seem to have been so captivated by the idea that we would use it on our own. But even here, de-brainwashing would be a contradiction. Would not the logic of our most recent acts suggest that we offer misguided ex-prisoners fifty thousand dollars to recant?

TWO REQUESTS

THERE should be wide public support for the President's request for emergency legislation to relieve population pressures in Western Europe. The conditions that led to the American displaced persons policy of the first postwar years have not entirely cleared up. In recent months they have actually been aggravated by the flow of refugees from East Germany and other points beyond the Iron Curtain. The Allied countries which have offered refuge to these exiles from the tyranny in their native lands are hard put to support this added burden. The two hundred forty thousand non-quota aliens President Eisenhower would admit during the next two years would materially ease this burden. Congress ignored a similar request from Mr. Truman. This time several Senators have offered to introduce the required legislation, but the doubtful element is Congress as a whole.

Even harder sledding appears to be in store for the President's more general request addressed to the Senate Judiciary Committee. His letter is directed at the McCarran Act itself, with ten specific points which Mr. Eisenhower believes should be

NEXT WEEK

GUNNAR D. KUMLIEN writes about Italian movies.

"Almost all the producers are strongly conservative or even reactionary to a point that would shock the average American. The directors, on the other hand, and practically all the actors are leftists, many of them Communists or at least fellow-travelers. Yet it would never occur to the most reactionary producer to refuse to hire a certain actor just because he is a Communist. Business is business. Likewise a Communist director would never hesitate to accept a proposal from the most reactionary producer. Politics are simply ignored on both sides when films are made, and the political extremes somehow neutralize each other. That is no doubt one reason that Italian films are so human and capable of being appreciated both in the West and in the world of the 'people's democracies.' "

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re-examined. One is the provision that the displaced persons we have welcomed to our shores have used up their nations' immigration quotas far into the future—in some cases until the twenty-first century. Other important provisions questioned deal with political subversion or give excessive authority on individual admissions to administrative personnel. The President's letter created hardly a ripple in Congress. So far it appears simply that he has gone on record in favor of revision of the McCarran Act. That will be the end of it unless it is made plain to members of Congress that on this issue, which vitally affects our whole foreign policy, the President has widespread and vociferous public backing.

THE WAYS OF POLITICS

AMERICANS generally claim to be confused by the intricacies of European politics. Explanations of the machinery for a by-election in England, say, or of the operations of the multiple political parties in France leave the average American citizen shaking his head. By contrast with European ways, the operation of our own political system seems remarkably simple—at least in theory. In practice, political life in the U.S. can be highly confusing.

Take, for example, the problems involved in trying to explain the present political situation to a visitor from abroad. The last Administration was charged with being "too soft" on Communism. When the people went to the polls, the accusation evidently stuck in their minds, and a new Administration was elected, one which would presumably take a firmer line with Communism.

Now the first budget request by the new President cuts eight and one-half billion dollars out of previously planned spending, largely from military expenditures and aid for our anti-Soviet allies. This cut will not be enough for members of the President's own party, however, and present indications are that majority members in the Congress will want to cut still more. Some of them are obviously determined to do almost anything to fight Communism —almost anything, that is, that will not cost money and interfere with campaign promises to cut taxes.

In the House and Senate, however, there is a hardy band known as the anti-Communists. They receive great publicity and exert great influence. In recent years they have acquired national reputations as enemies of Communism, and the office-holder who raises his voice against them risks his job and his reputation. Surely the members of this brave band can be counted on to save the day.

But no, the anti-Communists cannot be counted on either. They will investigate unions, schools, churches—you name it and they will probe it. They will vote funds for almost any investigation of "Communist influence" on the domestic scene. But when the question of spending money for military defense against the Soviet arises, those who are called the anti-Communists grow strangely silent.

Will there, then, be no voices raised against slashing defense expenditures? Oh yes, those Congressmen whose party lost the last election for being too soft toward Communism are likely to make nuisances of themselves. But they, after all, have been repudiated at the polls.

With this much of the primer of American politics covered, a foreign visitor might then want to know what the difference is between the old isolationists who slashed funds for defense and the new anti-Communists who vote the same way. But for that answer he would have to wait, because no one has figured it out yet.

CRISIS IN ASIA

IT is not impossible that most of Southeast Asia will be Communist within a year. That is the gravity of the situation in Laos, Indochina today. If the Viet Minh forces reach the Mekong River, the border between Thailand and Indochina, the Thai and Burmese governments will have a gun at their heads. And there are no French troops in those countries to fight invaders.

The aid we are sending the French will help Laos hold out. But it is a cork in a dike that is turning to sand. This is a time when corks, like Washington's speculations about the domestic political effects of losing Indochina, are singularly meaningless.

The essential first step must be made by France. It must grant real independence to the Associated States, giving the Indochinese people something worth fighting for.

And the integrity of Thailand and Burma must be guaranteed. A guarantee by the United Nations might work, although the possibility of carrying it out should the Communists disregard it would be enormously difficult both politically and militarily. And the Soviet veto in the Security Council lies across the path of effective action like a fallen Sequoia.

There is one slim but profoundly meaningful possibility. Prime Minister Nehru of India has recently been reported to be considering a sort of Monroe Doctrine for Southeast Asia, pledging India to defend the integrity of Asia's new nations. If he were to act now, he could almost certainly save South Asia on Asia's terms, and in doing so win the gratitude and respect of the Free World.

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My Novels

"TO WRITE ONE BOOK, JUST ONE, THAT WOULD ABSOLVE ME FROM WRITING ANY OTHER ONE: I HAVE NEVER BEGUN A NOVEL WITHOUT HOPING."

FRANCOIS MAURIAC

Translated by Frances A. Lippman

IS there, I wonder, a single French novelist who has not been tempted to write another *La Comédie humaine?* It is to this temptation, in fact, that the vogue of the cyclic novel is largely due. And, although I have yielded to it less than some, it has not left me wholly untouched. In my early novels there is an effort to establish relationships among my characters; and, as with the Peloueyres, the Casenaves, the Desqueroux, it was clearly my ambition to tell the story of a family.

But this ambition soon gave way to a stronger one: to write one book, just one, that would absolve me from writing any others. I have never begun a novel without hoping that it would be that one. Each time, I felt I must make a wholly new start, saying to myself, in the spirit of the man who decides to begin life over again, that I had written nothing. I had to persuade myself that nothing of what had gone before counted, always believing that my masterpiece would be the book in hand.

Hence, my complete writings give the impression of a number of fresh starts rather than a continuity. Critics who have honored me with studies of my entire work have all been struck by the fact that I use the same traits of character more than once, and attribute them to different people. This is because each of my novels was born, if I may so put it, out of the miscarriage of the others, and I was not even aware that I made use of elements which had already served me.

These elements were drawn from experiences of my inner life which were at once the most deep-seated and the farthest removed in time, but always situated within the narrow limits of my own universe. For just as I was not to yield to the temptation of the cyclic novel, so also did I remain unmoved by critics who reproved me for not depicting my own time. No novelist can pretend that he does not want to leave behind a valid body of observation witnessing to the time in which he lived, and this ambition was also mine. But I was resolved not to describe my period from the outside.

This is where the influence of Proust upon me was a dominant one, or rather—since it is nowhere apparent, I believe, in my style or in the structure of my novels—this is where the case of Proust helped me to understand my own. Proust strengthened and justified me in the stubborn belief, to which no doubt I should have been inclined even though I had not known *Remembrance of Things Past,* but of which he helped me to become conscious, that nothing pertaining to my time would find its way into my work unless I had first encountered it in myself.

And here I must pause to confess that the limited universe I portray is drawn to my own measure. At least, I shall have had the merit of not having forced my talent. In the case of Proust, the whole of the society of his day passed through him: it was as if he had absorbed it, then turned it back to us transfigured by what had been added to it of reality during its passage through, or rather its sojourn within, a prodigiously intelligent and sensitive being. And that is why he was unable to portray himself without at the same time portraying the world.

The universe which I rediscover in myself is a very different one from his. It is a small world of the past, a strictly contained world that scarcely overflows the boundaries of my own life. I am frequently reproached for this, but I am a severe enough self-critic to have earned the right to consider it unjust to attribute to my art as defects those very traits which insure its probity.

VIEWED as a whole, my experience might even be said to be quite broad, for I left my native Bordeaux at twenty-one and soon began to take my place in the world. But, here again, I must come back to another point of kinship with Proust: I do not observe or describe, I recollect; and what I recollect is the narrow Jansenist world of my pious, withdrawn and anguish-ridden childhood, and the province which cradled it. And, having become a man, although I lived in Paris and very soon became involved in a mode of life that is sufficiently agitated on the surface, com-

Mr. Mauriac was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1952.

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ing to know all sorts of people and frequenting the most diverse groups, all this transpired as if, at the age of twenty, a door within me had closed forever on all that was destined to become the matter of my art. This is not to say that, here and there along the way, I have not added elements borrowed from my immediate experience; but, and this is what I wish to say, they have been added, added on; they did not just come into being. They are no more than brilliant afterstrokes, touches which contribute something to the effect but do not spring from the core itself of the work.

My world is a small one, as I have said, restricted to one class, a bourgeoisie undergoing transformation, perhaps headed toward extinction; to one city, and one or two natural settings—barren heath or vineyard; one religion, or rather religious atmosphere, of which almost nothing survives today, even among Catholics; to conflicts which the evolution of morals has rendered almost incomprehensible.

Critics have been frank to say that all this is of steadily diminishing interest, and that only the poetry in my fiction—to which they readily admit—sustains it: a poetry of harmony between landscape and human beings, between nature and the passions, between the human soul and the mountain peaks tormented by the same gales; or emanating from the heat, the torpor of the moors, the flames that devour them like a passion, the hail that beats down like stones on the crucified grapevines.

It seems to me, however, that as my work grew some of the people I have created stand out as living by their own right and independently of any atmosphere. But whether they appear to be, as it were, sustained by a world of sensuous images and odors, taking whatever semblance of life is theirs from the sensorial hyperesthesia—tactile and olfactory, according to some—which their creator enjoys, is not for me to judge. The truth is, as I see it, that they do indeed owe their existence to me, and that their existence is linked to mine; but this link belongs to another order, which is spiritual.

I give them their life, that is true. If a writer of novels is first of all a man who creates a world from which he himself is absent, then I am not a novelist. And I am not sure that such a one exists. Flaubert's saying, "Madame Bovary is myself," expresses a truth that is applicable to all great writers of fiction. The difference between them and myself is less a matter of essentials than of degree. I am more directly bound up with my work than any of my predecessors, which is why so many critics see in me a poet who expresses himself by means of the novel. It is true that a work of fiction utilizes a creative wellspring that might have poured forth in the form of poetry. Those who hold fiction in contempt might liken this to the harnessing of a mountain torrent for industrial use. But, if I am first and foremost a poet, and I have never questioned this, at no time have I ever deliberately betrayed poetry for the sake of the novel.

For, despite the encouragement given me by Maurice Barrès, I felt that my first poems promised little that would eventually rank me above the rest; perhaps it is for this reason that I renounced the frail melody that would have gone unheeded even by my own time, since the Jammist technique which inspired it had already been superseded by a wholly new movement stemming from Rimbaud and Lautréamont. None of this, however, deterred me from polishing the verses of *Le Sang d'Atys,* now included with all my poems since 1913 in a volume entitled *Orages.* There is no part of my work which I prefer to my poetry, and the poor reception accorded this volume on publication in no way diminishes my estimate of it, or shakes my belief that some day it will be rediscovered. Nonetheless, it was fiction, and not poetry, which released in me that irrepressible confidence, that cry of the inspired man which he is powerless to contain.

No, it is not a society that I depict. And if one social class appears to be singled out from the rest, this should not be taken as deliberate. Nor is it the result of any effort or conscious seeking that my novels overrun the boundaries of my own personal destiny, and thus acquire a broader significance. This is an instance where luck is in my favor. Each of my novels is an enigma the answer to which is myself, the being that I am, who, though he is indecipherable, is still easy to know.

I have written several volumes of a *Journal* intended for the general public, from which my true self is absent. But, in my fiction, which serves as a screen, I hold back nothing of myself, and do so with perfect safety, since regardless of how large our public may appear to be, our books are not really read. The majority of readers run through them rapidly, as if they were in a forest they were eager to get out of. Only a few stop, observe, listen, heed the author's hints and nudges. However, for the benefit of those who wish to trace the broad lines of a life as it unfolds in my works, I offer a few guiding remarks.

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THE book which I am forever rewriting, that wave, which is always the same one as it rises endlessly out of my inner ocean, inevitably strikes and breaks against the self-same reef: love, the cult of childhood and adolescence, attachment to an object which eludes all grasp. The hero of *Le Noeud de Vipères,* speaking of his daughter, Marie, and his nephew, Luc, speaks for me in interpreting this profound feeling. And the "monsters" I am accused of creating appear monstrous only in so far as they are judged side by side with the child within them who does not want to die, whose face is still shining with what Claudel has called "the everlasting infancy of God."

But the attraction of the fleeting, of what "no man shall see twice," is not solely the mark of childhood. "The Desert of Love'" might well serve as the title for my entire work. All of it illustrates what philosophers today call the "problem of the other one," the passionate desire to possess the other one, not as a passive object and as someone "I look at," but as subject, as an inaccessible being "who looks at me." To possess the body of another is to embrace a corpse.

Nonetheless, if I was an existentialist before the fact, it was without my knowledge, and it is this that gives me cause for pride. A work of fiction, once accomplished, should, if it has any value, furnish the philosopher with involuntary, not preconceived, evidence. Its value, as I see it, lies not in having taken a given philosophy as its point of departure, nor in being written to illustrate a given conception of the universe, but in bearing witness in the true sense of that term. My work seems to me (whether this be its strength or weakness is not for me to say) the least preconcerted, the most instinctive and spontaneous imaginable.

What is disquieting in the present concern with techniques of so many new French writers is not that they are eager to know what there is in Joyce, Dos Passos or Faulkner that is valid and assimilable for them, but that they mistakenly believe in the existence of any rules having universal value. This betrays a failure to understand the fundamental law that a true novelist must first of all invent his own rules, rules which are valid for him alone and for the universe which it is in him to create. It is when the novel becomes moribund that the theorists of the novel begin to swarm.

The time factor, or duration, in such novels as *War and Peace* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls,* hardly warrant comparison with whatever it is that corresponds to it in a French novel deriving from the Racinian tragedy, which undertakes to define a life at its most crucial moment. I take Thérèse Desqueroux as she leaves the courtroom, just after the judge has dismissed the charge against her. She is about to encounter the husband whom she tried to murder. On the way, first in a cab, later in a railway carriage, she recalls the circumstances of the tragedy: her past flows in upon her present. At the same time, she is reflecting about what her attitude should be toward her victim, the man she is soon to confront: the near future is beating with its wave against a present that is passing, in the train that is bearing her away. This is the sensation which had to be conveyed to the reader—a moment in the present being assailed by an entire past that is over and an entire life not yet begun. To achieve this effect I relied upon what my instinct suggested.

As to the objection that I cannot know what is going on inside Thérèse when she herself does not, that is a charge from which no novelist is exempt, even those who condemn such a device in the belief that a character should be known by his words and gestures alone, and that these should not even elicit the author's comment. I have been charged with passing judgment on my heroes and playing God. The truth is that Thérèse Desqueroux eludes all judgment, above all her own; she is terribly free at every moment of her existence, looking on while the outlines of the figure she is to become, and to remain until eternity, are etched ever deeper by her every move and gesture.

ONE young critic, a novelist himself, claims, strangely enough, that I do not have the right to condemn my characters, and transfers to the esthetic plane the law which imputes to God the task of searching men's hearts and testing their loins. This rule may very well apply to him, and it is, I believe, valid for some of my characters, of which Thérèse is the type. But to conform to it in every case seems to me absurd, even meaningless. The truth is that a Christian novelist is the very one whom this concerns the least, since the judgment he passes on his creatures, whether he wishes it or no, remains in a state of suspense while under continuous counterstress from the workings of Grace, which, though invisible, is ever-present in his work.

Grace it is that brings to some readers, and denies to others, an understanding of the ephemeral world of my invention, some remains of which may, or may not, continue to exist after me. While some of my younger fellow novelists find me unreadable for reasons of technique, there are others who like and ad-

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mire my work even though my ideas are alien to them. An atheistic writer, for example, may read me for reasons of style, or because he is curious about my version of a world which is, after all, also his world. On the other hand, he is not able to hold *my* interest. What constitutes the true life for me is absent from his portrayal. The world of his creation may still, to a degree, be operated by God, and humanity by the soul, but for me it is devoid of interest; I should say, devoid of reality, literally nonexistent. And, for the same reason, as I well understand, the atmosphere of my books is intolerable to the atheist, since his interest is never for an instant held by the fate of my characters, all of whom can be summed up in a single central figure in whose existence he does not believe—the sinful and redeemed human soul.

It would be a mistake to try to explain this conception of a unified world, through which, from the vine which is Christ to the branches which are ourselves, circulates the same sap, the same blood, by a desire on my part to achieve spiritual health or mental comfort. The communion of the saints is a living experience to me, and doubtless to many of my friends in France and outside of France. This is true above all, naturally, of Christians. But unbelievers, too, know this overlapping of destinies by another name; if they do not define it at all, they do experience it. As for the others, they may appear to be finding fault with my technique, but the truth it that the world of my books seems absurd to them, just as theirs is nonexistent to me.

At this point, it would be well to note the difference between the atheistic novel of the present day and that of Proust, for example, from which likewise God appears to be absent, though His existence is not denied, no more than is that of the human soul. The world of Proust cannot be defined as a world without a soul, but rather as a world in which the unity of the person has been destroyed, where the soul subsists in its *disjecta membra.*

If, as I believe, no transformation of the world, however radical, will ever succeed in changing the human consciousness, novels such as mine have some chance of enduring. But at this juncture, Catholic readers will perhaps think that I take too generous a view of myself, that God is more of a stranger to my work than I imagine. I cannot, on this point, be my own judge.

The truth is that none of my characters, not even those to whom God is unknown, ever turns his back on the one and only aperture that opens heavenward, that narrow fissure which lets through a feeble ray of light. But their faith is nothing else than the name they give to their last hope, which they refuse to surrender; it answers no questions, least of all the fundamental question of the mystery of evil.

The Desert Fathers

The city failed you. No wind stirred
Among its houses, and its lights
Lured you to the lion, the leopard, and the wolf.

Crying for a wind to bend these houses
Strain and warp their steely structures
To parodies of tree,

Crying for a wind to seed their crevices,
Bursting their placid faces into flower,
Knocking with vineleaves the deadwood of their doors,

You resigned your place on the board of directors,
Withdrew your holdings in the joint stock company
And drew about you the brown cowl of your desert.

All this ambient bodily delight,
The dear indulgence of the unthinking flesh,
Deserted for rich solitudes of desert.

Times when the desert flowered into nightmare,
Athletes of God, you agonized to break
The bucking wanton between the thighs,

Or when at noon the hot bed of your sand
Was transfigured to a blind of snow,
You endured, on your motionless journey,

Alone to the Alone.
But fugitive from men,
Men sought you, the dry lands became
Overpopulated, and Stylites played to packed houses.

Carriers of an ascetic epidemic,
Gibbon's "squalid fugitives from light,"
You ruined Rome. Nature became

The wicked stepmother Our Father wedded
In a thoughtless moment, and feet in ashes
Unshaven Cinderellas dreamed of a Prince of Nails.

Barbarians of sanctity, you stand accused
Of desertion. When the five gates were rushed
By the Gothic mob, you whispered our citizens

Tempting to your pastoral Sahara
Where God's burning light melts sand to mirror
To illustrate your selfish shadows.

Willfully you chose the easier battle:
Freed from the daily sniping of anxiety
And the miner beneath the walls, you

Basked in a private concentration camp
Of accepted horrors. How will you plead
To the charges of your mutilated city?

Who sits alone and is quiet is free
Of three wars: hearing, speaking, sight.
But against one foe he will ever fight:

His own heart. Do not despise us,
Elected to the way of rejection,
Whose service you can never understand.

When the dancers stumble and mistake their partners,
It is the Fool who dances alone,
Preserves the pattern and redeems the time.

To you, defenders, rebuilders of the city,
We tender, even against your wishes,
Grace, the exotic flower.

JOSEPH P. CLANCY.

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The Magic of Mauriac

"TO LOVE, FOR HIS HEROES AND HEROINES, IS TO FALL VICTIM TO A KIND OF TRICK OR MIRAGE."

DONAT O'DONNELL

IN 1952 the Nobel Prize for Literature went to Francois Mauriac, who has, over forty years and in more than twenty novels, written of men and women as answerable to God, guilty in the sight of God, and serving always, willingly or unwillingly, the mysterious purposes of God.

Six years ago this same prize, this European accolade, went to another Frenchman who had, over a longer period and in a greater number of words, shown us men and women learning to rejoice in the idea that they were answerable only to themselves, that they were not guilty at all, and that they served no supernatural purpose.

Mauriac himself was horrified when the Nobel Prize was awarded to André Gide. It was, he thought, a sinister portent that the stricken Europe of today should single out for honor the great immoralist, the experimental anti-Christ. His horror, one imagines, must now be tinged with confusion. The fact that it has been possible to award this prize both to Gide and to Mauriac provokes the mind to grapple with the ambiguities, perhaps the contradictions, that are present in our idea of literature. Some may say that there is really no problem, that both Gide and Mauriac are honored as masters of French prose, without regard to the contradictory messages which they are using their mastery to convey. So, they might argue, one might consistently praise both Saladin and Richard the Lion-Hearted for their military skill, rightly excluding, as irrelevant to this particular subject, the debate of Cross and Crescent. For all I know, this, or something like it, may be the view of the five judges, appointed by the Norwegian *Storthing*, who make the Nobel award. It would be fitting enough that the spirit of the Parnassians should linger on in the North among those icicles of Thule which they so often used as symbols of the death-like detachment they admired. Sully-Prudhomme, who was, as it happens, the first winner of the Nobel prize, would have seen nothing incongruous in honoring two masters of opposing tendencies: his only doubt would have been whether either of them had the right to a tendency at all.

But in our own time most people, and even most writers, have rejected the Parnassian attitudes. "Art for Art's Sake" is a phrase we treat with suspicion, and that only partly because of its debasement by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. The most influential writers of today tell us that literature is committed in the political and social struggle: *la littérature engagée*. Although neither Gide nor Mauriac belonged to the little group which has impressed this slogan upon our consciousness, they would both, I think, have given it some kind of assent. They both were teachers, inculcating different and irreconcilable sets of opinions, and they regarded their teaching, or at any rate the content of their works, as more important than their prose style.

Is there not then, one may say, a detestable dilettantism, a frivolous complacency, in honoring them both? Is it not debasing literature, and humanity, to institute competitions in mere elegance of expression, remaining indifferent to what is being expressed? Is it not like the action of some fatuous Religious Book-of-the-Month Club which might choose successively the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam and the New Testament? Worst of all, does not this jaded byzantinism, indifferent to moral values, confirm the judgment of those who speak of the decadence of the West?

SUCH questions should be asked if only because they force us, with their dangerous misconceptions, to think of what literature really is, of what thing worthy of praise a great novelist like Mauriac actually does. Literature is surely neither an abstract and self-sufficient pattern, as the Parnassians asserted, nor yet just another form of propaganda in favor of the good, or the bad, life. It is the most human, the least pure of the arts, the one that tells us most about ourselves. It is—to use a word that has lately been much misused—our self-criticism, a subtle and continuing process. I say continuing, but of course we have no certainty that it will continue: we have seen of late that in certain conditions literature can become a system of political flattery and fictionalized slogans, and that

Mr. O'Donnell, a leading Irish critic, is the author of "Maria Cross," a study of eight modern Catholic novelists.

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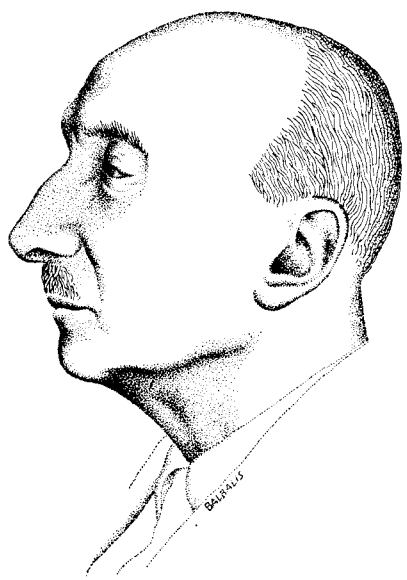
the word self-criticism, in the same climate, turns into a technical term, meaning forced confession of crude and improbable crimes.

These practices of total politics must lead not merely to a blunting of human conscience, but probably to an actual dulling of consciousness itself; in short, a regression to a lower human type. It has been, on the other hand—and it still is—the glory of our bourgeois culture that it has eventually honored those who have not flattered it. Those who do flatter it are of course more numerous and better paid but that is not very important; what is important is that the process of self-criticism, the painful movement towards a finer consciousness, still continues.

In that process these two writers, Gide and Mauriac, with their exceptional lucidity and sensibility, have played a great part. Different though their views of the universe are, they have both tried to tell the truth—not such a simple matter as is generally believed—and to provide increasingly delicate and sensitive instruments for recording and expressing it. This is the great common element in their so diverse achievement, and it is this above all that justifies the conferring of the same honor on the two spiritual adversaries.



FRANCOIS MAURIAC

Mauriac started telling the truth in 1922, and stopped about ten years later for reasons which I will go into in a moment. During that period, when he was in his late thirties and early forties, he gave us nine novels, beginning with *Le Baiser au Lépreux* and ending with *Le Noeud de Vipères;* this group of novels includes his best work and in particular the two splendid peaks of his achievement, *Genitrix,* which appeared in 1924, and *Le Désert de l'Amour* in 1925. The seven novels which have appeared since 1932 are—with one partial exception, *La Pharisienne*—little more than a companionable reminder of a great presence—like the broadcast talks of Mr. E. M. Forster.

I have spoken of ten years during which Mauriac spoke the truth. What was the nature of that truth? It was, in the words of a watchful critic of the twenties: "disturbing and unhealthy;" "bizarre and morbid;" "very pernicious and morally base." These adjectives, describing the best work of one who is now universally esteemed as a great Catholic novelist, fall strangely on our ears. Mauriac was, of course, then, as he is now, a Catholic. But he did not then consider, as he does now, that edification and the avoidance of scandal were primary concerns of the Catholic writer. He even distrusted and disliked—as do most Catholic writers—the very words "Catholic writer" for he knew that his best work as a novelist sprang, not from faith and reason, but from the imagination, a very weak Christian. The Catholic and the writer did not form a dual entity: they were separate and related in a complex and changing manner. For Mauriac at this time imaginative truth was the first, and at his greatest moment the only consideration. "Only fiction does not lie," he wrote, "it opens on the life of man a secret door through which slips in, altogether unchecked, his unknown soul." What then was the nature of the traffic through this secret door, in the days when it was open?

It was a traffic, first of all, between the mind and nature, the natural forces of a given place. Mauriac is a man of Bordeaux and almost all his work—all his best work—is rooted in that hot and sandy region, the land of pines and vines, of sun and storms and forest fires. Here is that forest of symbols of which Baudelaire speaks: here are correlatives of human passion. "Sultry" and "torrid" are adjectives which one now proffers with diffidence: they have been debased by cinema advertisers in order to provide a stimulating explanation for the discontented, bad-tempered or simply vacant expressions of so many film stars. Otherwise one would inevitably apply one or other of them to Mauriac's world, with its electric air and its impending storms of lust and rage and hail and lightning. One of his heroines "believed implicitly," he tells us, in "these stage directions carefully drawn up by the Supreme Being for the lives of each and all of us . . . the soil had to be softened by the storm." It would be easy to discount this as a trick, and of course, a trick is sometimes just what it is. A very good critic, Mr. William Empson, has referred to the frequency with which characters in plays look out of windows in hope of observing a 'pathetic fallacy.' It sounds cynical, but the play in question is "Macbeth" and the pathetic fallacy is the light thickening and the crow making wing to the rooky wood. The process, whether fallacy or metaphor, or both, is a very old one, probably inherent in the conditions of human experience. Our everyday use of a meteorological term, "atmosphere," to describe human relationships, should remind us how deep in our thinking this fallacy goes. It reminds us also that it is not always a fallacy, for the meteorological atmosphere does really affect the emotional atmosphere.

In Mauriac's case, there were several reasons why the process should be an essential part of his imagination and not—except when he became tired and parodied himself—just a trick. He is, like so many

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religious writers, mainly interested in childhood and youth, and it is natural that the sights and sounds and smells of the Gironde of his boyhood should recur to his mind or should be deliberately invoked. Here a comparison with Proust is possible. *Remembrance of Things Past,* as we know, is organized round certain spasms of involuntary memory: the biscuit soaked in tea, the uneven flag-stones, the red phase from Vinteuil's sonata. Proust deliberately, almost religiously, respected these mental landmarks, and turned the wheel of his great baroque world around them, as his Paris turned around the low hill of the Etoile. In Mauriac there is no such deliberate orientation, no such architecture. Yet when he refers to certain sounds or smells—the song of the cicadas, the smell of burning resin—there is an excitement, a lyricism in his prose, an extra tension in his narrative. It is as if it were really Proust's intermittent God in the machine that was giving these "stage-directions" under which nature seems to take part in the human drama. The two principal characters in *The Desert of Love* know that the impending storm cannot break "until the last bull has died in the arena." That seems to be a magical belief—and Mauriac has been reproached for it—but is it not really a phenomenon of memory?

THE truth is, I think, that memory is assisted by magic. I have said that the imagination is a weak Christian but it cannot help, in our culture, being a Christian of sorts. Mauriac's imagination is deeply penetrated by the sense of a divine purpose in all things and consequently of the unity of creation, in which the natural forces not only may, but must, relate themselves to human lives. It is also penetrated—and sometimes seems more deeply so—by the sense of an evil counter-purpose, of diabolic intervention. Most of his stage-directions seem to come from this quarter and often, as in so many other Catholic writers, as with Bernanos especially, we are left with the impression of a world entirely given over to the powers of evil.

"Thanks to a certain gift of atmosphere," he later wrote in an attempt at justification, "I try to make perceptible, tangible, odorous, the Catholic universe of evil." That sounds well, but its suggestion of purpose is probably false. The picture of the well-meaning author using his "gift of atmosphere" as an instrument for exposing evil does not convince. The imagination, source of all this famous atmosphere, is neither so purposeful nor so well-meaning. But it is true that it is in creating an atmosphere of evil that Mauriac's imagination excels, and that what one might call his respect for evil is characteristically Christian and, specifically, Catholic.

The atheist Gide liked to write of crime and he wrote about it with a curious detached innocence; in his writing horrible crimes happen, but they happen, as it were, without a pedigree; they still belong to the world of newspaper clippings, the *fait divers,* rather than the world of "King Lear" or "Oedipus Rex." Their fragmentary, accidental character seems to me to result from that voluntary, that almost austere, limitation of the imagination which is involved in the act of atheism. For the religious writer however, who not merely believes but feels that there is a purpose in the universe, it follows necessarily that the presence of evil must inspire awe. In an extreme case like Mauriac it inspires a fascinated horror, a permanent Jansenistic fear and trembling before the God who permits and punishes sin. For him, as for other religious writers—and one thinks especially of Dostoevsky—evil is not just an accident, or a social by-product, but an ever-present condition and a universal system.

In Mauriac's work, evil expresses itself above all in terms of domination and captivity. Early in his career he told us of his fascination with "the power of minds over other minds which are inferior to them," and this is still the theme of his latest novel *Goligai - The Loved and the Unloved.* Nor is it really only the power of minds—the word in French is the ambiguous *esprits*—but a spiritual power, and an emotional dominance of the whole personality. The context of this phenomenon is usually the family, an institution which is compared to a prison: "the living bars of a family." The archetype of all his novels, so far as this situation is concerned, is *Genitrix* (1924), one of the earliest works of his maturity, and one of the finest he has ever written.

THIS idea of evil as emotional domination has a great and varied extension in Mauriac's work. It pervades, I think, his whole concept of sexual love, which is the main theme of most of his novels. To love, for his heroes and heroines, is to fall victim to a kind of trick or mirage. He has spoken of the certitude fatal to human happiness "that carnal love is evil, evil which we cannot help committing."

The theological warrant for so unqualified a statement, is, I imagine, slender, but it is never, with Mauriac, a question of theology, so much as of emotional conviction. Why should one *feel* that carnal love is evil—ignoring for the moment the un-Irish assumption that one cannot help committing it?

I believe that the root of the feeling lies in the dread of domination, and in particular the dread and attraction of maternal domination, so terribly expressed in *Genitrix.* Very old and primitive connections of ideas are also at work: notably the fallacies of witchcraft, the theories that the beloved has cast a spell over the lover: that the lover is surrendering his soul, that

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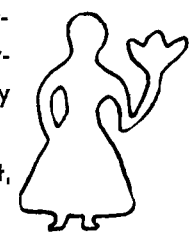

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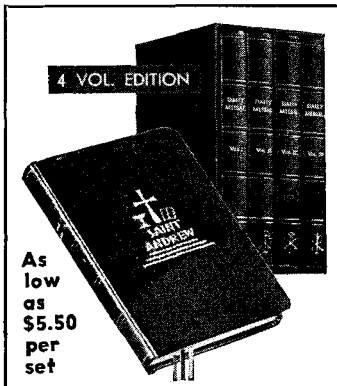

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is, power over himself, to the beloved; that pleasure is an instrument of domination, and cruelty an instrument of emancipation. These old and ignorant ideas still fight a rearguard action in the *Maquis* of our mind and occasionally supplies are parachuted in to them from the outside. They form an important part of the history of the idea of evil, and they supply a subterranean resonance to the sensuality of the superstitious. There is certainly both sensuality and superstition in Mauriac's novels of the twenties. They are, according to a clerical critic, "steeped in an atmosphere of refined sensuality, that penetrates to the marrow of your bones"—a remark that surely belongs with the finest examples of advertising copy.

This was the origin of the charge of "collusion with evil" which was persistently leveled at Mauriac by Catholic critics, and others, up to 1929. He defended himself as best he could. First, it was the business of the novelist to tell the truth, and, since truth was of God it was impossible in this way to offend God. Basically this arguement is sound, but as he developed it, it ceased to be so. He spoke of "reproducing the modern world as it exists" but in fact, as he well knew, and as his critics told him, he was not doing anything of the kind: his "truth" was subjective and emotional, not scientific. His other defense was that "there are no loves, only one Love." His heroes and heroines, in so far as they really love, love God. He shows them discovering the corrupt and unsatisfactory nature of physical love. "We take the only road we can," says the heroine of *Le Desert de l'Amour,* "but it doesn't lead towards what we're looking for."

HIS critics answered that the theory of this was correct, but that his practice was quite different. He said that he regarded carnal love as evil, but he depicted it as seductive. André Gide—and this was apparently the last straw—paid him a perfidious compliment. "The object of your novels," he wrote, "is not so much to bring sinners to Christianity as to remind Christians that there is something on earth besides heaven. . . . Doubtless if I were more of a Christian I should be less your disciple."

Mauriac himself, in the spring of 1929, came to admit the truth of such criticisms. "I depicted evil with a secret collusion," he admits, "because I was describing attractions which I felt." He now determined to eliminate this characteristic of his work: this determination was the main artistic result of the crisis which is known as his conversion. He now accepted M. Jacques Maritain's doctrine of altitude: that the artist in portraying evil must keep his distance. The old collusion must go; the secret door must be kept shut.

Spiritually this no doubt represented an advance.

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Intellectually it was a clarification, for there was confusion as well as collusion in these novels. But artistically it represented a defeat. Mauriac had voluntarily accepted a kind of censorship, a permanent internal vigilance committee established in his imaginative world. He could no longer tell the truth as he felt it, for that might be collusion—or, as with the last of his great novels, *Le Noeud de Viperes*—it might seem to be lack of charity. He hedged himself round with extraneous restrictions until almost everything he wrote —and he still wrote a great deal—seemed touched-up, rearranged and false.

Fortunately, though perhaps rather curiously, he did not withdraw from publication the earlier work, *Le Baiser au Lépreux, Genitrix, Le Desert de l'Amour* and others in which he now admitted the existence of a certain collusion with evil. Fortunately: for it is by these works, with *Le Noeud de Viperes,* that his reputation will, in the long run, assuredly stand or fall. It will, I believe, stand.

SO high a valuation may seem, at first, inconsistent with the language I have used in describing the work of this period. How can work so abounding in "confusion," "collusion," "superstition," "witchcraft" and various kinds of fallacies, be rewarding? If telling the truth is all-important, what kind of truth is hidden at the botton of this cauldron?

The answer might very nearly be: the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The imaginative artist is, as it were, the only one who attempts the whole paper which the Creator has set us. The scientist attempts only questions of fact, available to measurement: only his conscious mind is relevant to his effort. For the psychoanalyst's patient on his couch, the unconscious alone is important. All of us in our daily lives respond at different times on different levels, now emotionally, now intellectually. No one attempts a total response, in which the whole personality takes part, in which the conscious mind collaborates closely and continuously with the unconscious. No one, that is, except the imaginative artist.

The truth he tells, being total truth, is at one and the same time, in one and the same fable, about everything human—about man's conflict within himself, about his relation to his immediate environment, and to the universe. It is often—if the expression may be used—a twisted and distorted truth—as the truth told by the rings on the section of an oak tree sometimes lies in twistings and shrinkings telling of drought or floods. In the writer these are the twists imparted by unresolved conflicts in the writer himself or in his culture, directly felt by him. They are of an altogether different nature from the twists—neither honorable nor truthful—inflicted by a deliberate censorship or a

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desire for edification or any other form of propaganda.

It was in this sense, and with such organic distortions that Mauriac told the truth. The magic let loose in his writing is latent in our minds also—whether as superstition or as intuition—but his merit is to be articulate.

I HAD a friend once whose mental world lay in a very different climate from Mauriac's. His favorite slogan, from which he seemed to derive great comfort, used to be, "Man is not a fallen angel but a risen ape." I think he would have been impatient with what I have had to say about Mauriac. In particular the idea of man as a prisoner, an emotional captive in a dungeon of guilt and half-perceived relations—that would have annoyed him. Even if it was true, he would argue, "what was the use of it?" Better an inspiring, a liberating picture of man. Better, for instance, Gide's fable "Prometheus badly chained" in which Prometheus, tired of his vulture's eternal nagging, simply turns round and wrings its neck. That is a heroic gesture, but your Mauriac heroes with their guilt-complexes are simply contemptible.

One could answer, I suppose, that there are more ways of killing a vulture than by wringing its neck; you can, for instance, choke it with liver. The light which such a writer as Mauriac brings about the dark and guilty places of the human heart is not what creates these dark and guilty places, nor do they cease to exist when the light is gone; on the contrary. But it is probably best to decline altogether the gambit of "what is the use?"; to forget Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch with his query about any poem: "Will it encourage the crew?" Let the crew sink or swim, if they can only be "encouraged" by jazzing-up the ship's log.

The battered old Parnassian slogan was at any rate better than that, but it would be better still in the revised form: "Art for truth's sake." That is the sole criterion which should ever have been applied—even by himself—to the work of so great a writer as Francois Mauriac.

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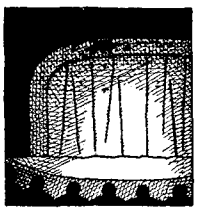
THE STAGE

BLEAK HOUSE

IN the Dickens guise—frock coat and jabot, his august person decorated by the fantail beard, the white gantlets and inevitable scarlet boutonniere—Mr. Emlyn Williams again resumes his voyage of discovery in the turbulent Dickens world. The subject of his attention is "Bleak House"—that dark, inchoate masterpiece, at once sweet and terrible—which plunders, for theme, the very fabric and texture of British society. In it, so Dickens noted, "I have purposely dwelt on the romantic side of familiar things." Its action is locked in a miasma of fog and rain and mud, and at its heart lies Chancery Court, that monstrous relic of inequity, marrying guilty and innocent alike in a deadly legal embrace. It was Dickens' conception, propagandistic and dramatic, to drop into this pool of misery that stone—the one deadweight of suffering—which would send its reverberations to the very limits of life. In the interminable history of Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce, he found his catalyst: the agent which at once permitted him to bind fashionable country homes to the grimy hovels of street-boys,



and throw into passionate relief his own rich and panoramic sense of the English social hierarchy.

It would be academic to object that Mr. Williams has diminished the novel; what is surely more relevant is that he filleted it with fastidious taste and a disciple's tender respect. (In a program note, Mr. Williams gently reminds his audience that if he stood up and read the masterpiece unabridged, "the reading would take over sixty hours and might overtax the audience as well as himself.") He has arranged the scheme of his adaptation about Lady Dedlock and her melodramatic "secret," stealthily tracked down by the sinister Tulkinghorn. But from this thread, he has suspended some of the great Dickensian portraits of folly: Mrs. Jellyby, determined missionary to the natives, whose eyes "looked a long way, as if they could see nothing nearer than Africa;" Mrs. Pardiggle, indefatigable lady of the many committees, and the five little Pardiggles, ferocious with discontent; Mr. Turveydrop, notorious model of deportment; Mrs. Badger, that jolly widow burying her husbands one after another, and finally Mr. Chadband, who spurts into the evening on a delicious jet of train oil.

To each of these satiric caricatures, Mr. Williams has given a sanguine eccentricity, but also a savage profile—a bite—which has its fundamental source in a moral attitude. His climaxes are managed with a virtuoso dexterity: on the death of the little sweep Jo,

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he works a vein of distinguished pathos, and the "spontaneous combustion" of old Krook, the rag-and-bone man, secretes at his touch a morbid power to play not only on the nerve-ends, but also on our deeper, interior apprehensions of horror.

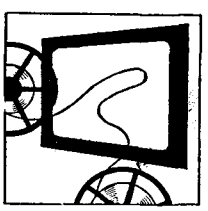
What enriches Mr. Williams' performance supremely—what, in the last analysis, projects it into the climate of greatness—is his ability to leave lingering on the retina of both eye and memory, the double image. For through Mr. Williams, one is conscious of the world he evokes, but conscious too—as in that drawing of Dickens surrounded by the swarming populous creatures of his mind—of the novelist and man himself, and the peculiar marriage of imagination and reality. When Mr. Williams, at the close of his program, steps before his desk and turning, bows to the empty lectern, his gesture has a moving and unexpected force. He has taken the last place, but because his humility is exceeded only by his love, he will surely be given the first. *(At the Bijou through May 9.)*

RICHARD HAYES.

THE SCREEN

FINE ITALIAN HANDS

NONE of the three new imports from Italy is likely to go down in cinema history as a great motion picture, but all three provide stimulating food for thought and entertainment.



Anna Magnani throws tremendous energy into her role of the mother in "Bellissima." The story by Cesare Zavattini (about a mother determined to get her little girl into the movies) gives the volatile Italian actress a chance to go to town. The results are both funny and sad—funny when the movie is satirizing all the mothers who bring their darlings to the contest at the film studio, sad when it depicts the nauseating lengths to which this mother will go.

"Bellissima" could have been a better movie if Director Luchino Visconti had tightened it; but many of its scenes of Rome and the Cinecitta Studios are fascinating. Especially good in the supporting cast are Tina Apicella, as the confused child who doesn't want to be an actress, and Walter Chiari, as a studio employee who tries to get all he can out of the mother with promises to turn her *bellissima* into a star.

"ROME Eleven O'Clock" is based on a true incident which occured in Rome in 1951. In answer to a "secretary wanted" ad, some two hundred

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girls apply for the job which only one can have. As the girls crowd the wooden staircase in the building, one of them rushes into the office out of turn and in the ensuing panic, the staircase gives way; the resulting accident is dreadful.

Director Guiseppi De Santis has handled his large cast and the script which he wrote with several other writers extremely well, but unfortunately his picture is so bogged down with propaganda that much of its potential effectiveness is lost. We get the background of several of these women who so desperately need a job: the streetwalker, the wife of an artist, the wife of a workman, the unmarried girl who needs work to support her coming baby, and others.

De Santis has been successful in giving us a picture of extreme need, of hopelessness and despair. But after the accident in which seventy women are hurt and one is killed, the points toward which all has been leading are made with a sledge hammer: who is responsible for this tragedy? The architect of the building, the landlord, the man offering the job, the woman who feels so guilty about applying out of turn? At the investigation someone says, "I'm sure you'll find a scapegoat. Spread it all over the papers and go home satisfied." Obviously, one is supposed to come to the conclusion that the system is all wrong and that any government which allows its people to be so desperately poor needs changing. Because "Rome Eleven O'Clock" is so well acted and so effective visually, it is a challenging and thought-provoking film; but like Harvey's heavy-drinking friend, we'd like to ask, "What did you have in mind?"

THERE'S no doubt what "Ring Around the Clock" has in mind. This delightful comedy, directed by Paolo W. Tamburello and based on an actual incident, is sort of a cross between "Bell for Adano" and "The Little World of Don Camillo," and it tells what happened in a small Italian fishing village when its people definitely unite on one project: the restoring of the town clock which was bombed during the war.

The village priest, charmingly played by Peppino Spadaro, organizes a lottery, but he makes so much money that he thinks some of it should be used to help the poor. His suggestion practically creates a riot; he is backed by the leader of the Christian Democrats, but the opposition, led by a Communist (Nando Bruno) and by a Socialist (Lauro Gazzlo), insists that the priest is using the lottery money, which should belong to all the people, for Church propaganda. This story with its resulting complications, is rather slow at first, and frequently much too talky, but it has wonderfully literate English subtitles by A. J. Liebling, and it is packed with good will toward men.

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The "Innocence" of an Art Which Endures

THE HOUSE BY THE MEDLAR TREE. By Giovanni Verga. Grove. $3.50.

By GEORGE MILES

IGNAZIO Silone has written that few Americans really understand the development of the Italian novel because only a few have read Giovanni Verga. Little, if anything, is said of him in literature classes, and his writing has not received much notice since D. H. Lawrence translated some of his stories about 1925.

Verga was born in Catania, Sicily, in 1840. He lived for some years in Florence and Naples and Milan where he worked as a journalist and, according to Lawrence, had "love affairs with elegant ladies." Earlier fiction, *Eva, Tigre Reale, Eros,* is the result of this period. But the Sicilian stories which are the best things he did followed his return to his own region where he died in 1922. Among these stories is *Cavalleria Rusticana,* the basis for the libretto of the popular opera by Mascagni.

This new edition of *The House by the Medlar Tree* (one appeared as early as 1890 with an introduction by William Dean Howells) uses the translation of Eric Mosbacher, which is listed in an earlier British publication. The book reveals the Malavoglia family, those sorrow-sodden people whose men fish and fight the sea, whose women cook, weave, weep and bear children. The story is not the story of a house, but of a family.

Master 'Ntoni, the grandfather, is leader of the Malavoglias in the house and the fishing boat, the ill-named *Provvidenza.* This old duty-bound man who quotes proverbs to overcome complaints and objections ("You must learn to be sexton before you can be Pope." "The sea is salt and the seaman dies at sea.") is a real old man of the sea. His son, Bastiano, is a burly, hard-working father himself, but he "wouldn't blow his nose without his father's permission;" his wife, Maruzza La Longa, his children, 'Ntoni ("a great lout of twenty"), Luca, Mena (who is known as St. Agatha), Alesi and Lia are the others in the Malavoglia tribe.

Their share of misfortune is great and they are almost overwhelmed by calamities and deaths. The troubles begin when Master 'Ntoni buys a boatload of lupins (seeds) on credit from Uncle Crocifisso (Old Dumb-Bell) and sends Bastiano asail for Riposto to sell them. The boat is wrecked, Bastiano is lost, and the Malavoglias find themselves near poverty. Nevertheless, Uncle Crocifisso, a merciless usurer who had sold rotten lupins in the first place, insists that payment be made, and Master 'Ntoni, the ignorant, guileless man who is the perfect victim for the predatory Crocifisso, agrees that the debt must be paid.

Young 'Ntoni, who had been drafted into the Navy, returns and slowly the Malavoglias put up the coins which will pay Old Dumb-Bell and provide a dowry for Mena. First they hire out to other fishermen, a difficult thing for these proud men, then they recover the beloved *Provvidenza* and resume their own work. But all their movements are doomed. Luca is called to the Navy; young 'Ntoni is bitter about the conditions in which he lives and begins to drink heavily; the *Provvidenza* is smashed once more; the old man is injured and almost dies. The house by the medlar tree is lost to Crocifisso and the pit into which the Malavoglias fall becomes deeper and blacker.

During all these incidents, which Verga recreates simply, dispassionately, powerfully, the other colorful personalities of the village present themselves—all of them possess a definite shape, a distinct character. With their shouts and whispers and threats and groans they assume a life which is strikingly real.

Verga presents his people in action. There is little description of them; they come into being during the incidents and they develop more definite personalities as the action progresses. And, although a mere summation of the events may make them appear excessive for a single novel, the actual unfolding of the narrative is always completely credible and compelling.

What makes this novel especially notable is the straight-forward quality of the writing, a kind of innocence which forces the author, for example, to reveal the important accidents before they occur. There are no surprise switches or psychological paddings. The reader knows that Bastiano will not return even before he leaves the shore, he knows that the house and the boat will be lost, that Luca will be killed in the Navy, that Mena will be jilted and that La Longa will die of cholera. Yet there is no diminution of interest as the story develops or lack of association when the event takes place. Verga's honesty and his artistry prevent it.

Eventually, the old man is sent to the poor house; he dies just before he is to be returned home. Young 'Ntoni who rejected the life which his grandfather accepted with patience and with love is sentenced to hard labor for a stabbing and later becomes a wanderer. Lia falls into prostitution and thereby reduces her beautiful sister, Mena, to spinsterhood. But Alessi marries his childhood sweetheart, regains the old home, and the name of Malavoglias is continued in the house by the medlar tree.

Verga wrote that ". . . [the novel] will exist by its own reason, by the mere fact that it is as it should be and must be, palpitating with life and yet as immutable as a bronze statue, the author of which has had the divine courage to eclipse himself and disappear in his immortal work."

There is no doubt that this novel palpitates with life of its own. The general neglect of Giovanni Verga is evidence in part, at least, of his disappearance in his work. But if Verga is neglected, his stories and his people endure and the greater loss is that suffered by those who fail to read him.

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Campus Communism

HERESY, YES—CONSPIRACY, NO. By Sidney Hook. John Day. $3.75.

By JOHN COGLEY

MR. Hook has written a lively, thought-provoking book on the present American cultural climate. *Heresy, Yes—Conspiracy, No* is jam-packed with truisms, debatable opinions (often set forth in a tone that would indicate that they were obvious facts), skillful polemics and ill-disguised prejudices. The author generously casts pearls throughout his book, and there was scarcely a page when this reviewer, for instance, didn't want to say "Hold on there, professor; let's look at that one!". But the professor was in a hurry, and, to Mr. Hook's credit as a writer, let it be said that the reviewer was anxious to keep pace.

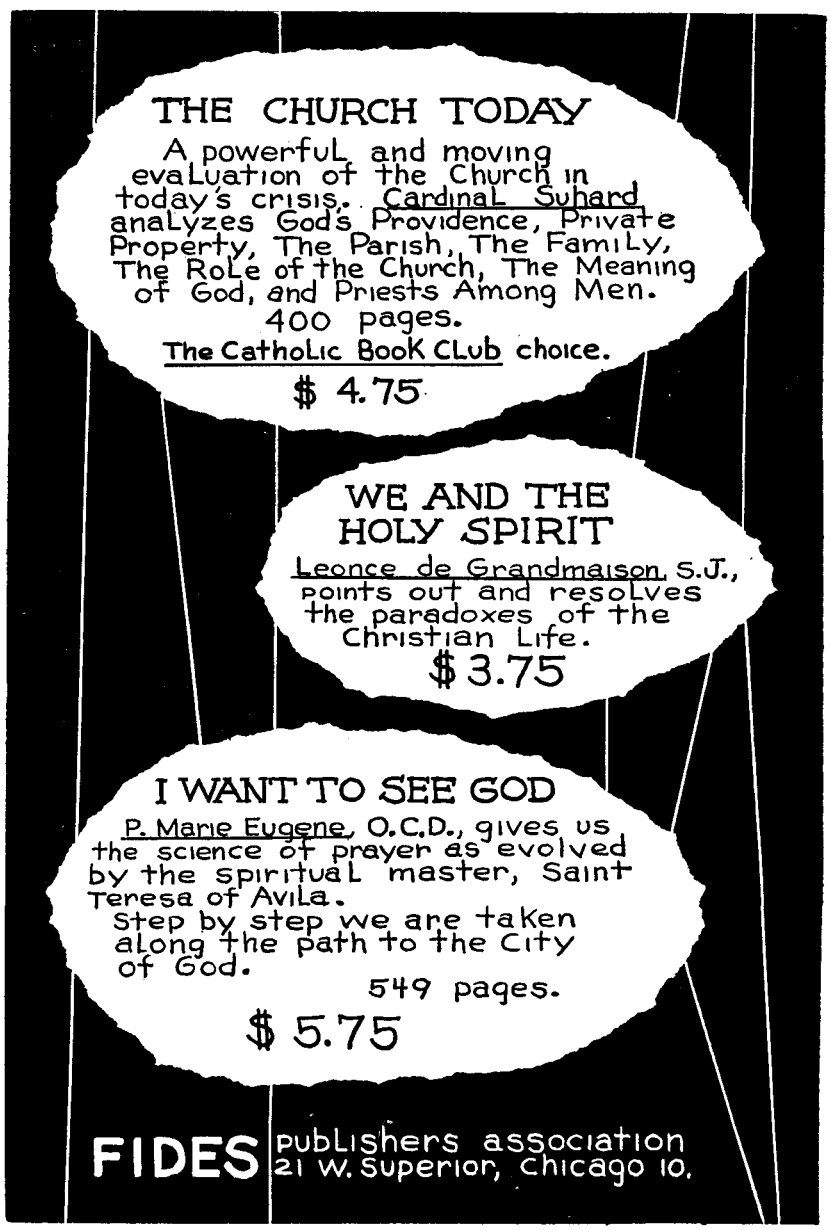
I cite a few of the apodictic statements that momentarily stopped me: "the absurdities [of treating] the statement in the Declaration of Independence about all men being created free and equal as a proposition in theology or biology instead of political ethics;" again, "I think it is demonstrable that neither the meaning nor the validity of moral ideas rests on supernatural foundations;" or, "there is no academic freedom in Catholic colleges and were Catholics to constitute a majority of the population, education would in all likelihood lose its secular character."

Each of these statements is worth an argument and actually has engaged the interest of some quite profound philosophers and thinkers. But Mr. Hook merely tosses them off and passes on, like a classroom lecturer determined not to notice waving hands.

He may be right about academic freedom in Catholic colleges, but I have had personal experience in a few Catholic colleges where I know students wouldn't let him get away with describing a respectable idea, like the one about man's essential equality deriving from his creation by God, as an "absurdity" and then skipping along to the next pronunciamento.

But it wouldn't be fair to Mr. Hook's book to emphasize points like this. What he is dealing with here is not so much his own relativist, anti-supernatural philosophy —belief in which, it seems to me, is practically equated to devotion to academic freedom and truly democratic thinking throughout the book —but rather with the specific question of Communists in the academic community. Mr. Hook has a clear and reasonable position on this pressing problem and has stated it with admirable clarity. He has provided a conscientiously detailed answer to the rather cloudy general charges made against his position in certain "liberal" circles, and given due consideration to all the problems of civil liberties implicit in the proposition that members of the Communist Party, by the very fact that they are such, are unsuitable as teachers in American colleges and universities.

The title of Professor Hook's book cogently sums up his general position. In the secular college or university, where there is no accepted test for absolute truth—where students come with the understanding that the institution is not in any way dedicated to a set of dogmas or doctrines—Communist "indoctrination" in the classroom is a betrayal of trust. By the same token there is no such thing as "heresy" in these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classrooms precisely because there is no accepted orthodoxy. The right to teach is granted to the professor by his peers in the academic community, and only they should divest him of it. Professor Hook, who cites numerous baneful activities of Communist professors in the past to back up his argument, holds that an individual who joins the Party to help it achieve its conspiratorial purposes, is thereby rendered unfit for academic trust and the task assigned to him. Convincingly, he argues that it is not the "heresy" of the Communist teacher which disqualifies him but the "conspiracy" implicit in his commitment to the Party. To defend this thesis, Mr. Hook has met every argument head-on, with, it seemed to me, considerably more logic and candor than those who have opposed him.

It is not necessary to agree with Professor Hook's philosophy of life and of education to support his position on this question. Nor is it necessary to agree with his minimization of the McCarthy menace to approve his excoriation of the "ritualistic liberals" and of the anti-anti-Communists in public life who are forever laying out the shroud of liberty. We seem to be living in an age of action and reaction. The anti-Communists of irrational temper undoubtedly helped to bring into existence that phenomenon now called anti-anti-Communism; but now reaction to the anti-anti-Communists has produced a kind of thinking that can only be described by the clumsy name of anti-anti-Communism (whose adherents bedevil everyone with doubts about the virtues of Senator McCarthy's crusade). It seems to me that Professor Hook is still a refreshingly independent thinker. His position on the Smith Act, for instance, indicates that he has not lined up with any of the wolf-packs now roaming the political terrain.

Hook is neither all-out against the Smith Act or all for. He holds it should be amended to proscribe against persons who advocate the duty, necessity, desirability or propriety of overthrowing the government *in the case that their efforts constitute a clear and present danger.* The presence of a "clear and present danger" will, he says, have to be determined in every case.

"The aim of the Smith Act was certainly justified in the light of the available facts," he argues. "But the method of achieving this aim—making powerless the Soviet fifth column—was inept. The proscription should have been placed, not on speech to achieve revolutionary overthrow, but on organization to achieve it, and not merely any organization but an organization set up and controlled by a foreign power."

Despite serious differences with Professor Hook on many questions of fairly basic philosophy, I found his book something of a relief after the excesses of both "ritualistic liberals" and "ritualistic patriots" which have been visited upon the nation in recent years.

The Dignity of Universal Meaning

SIGRID UNDSET. By A. H. Winsnes. Translated by P. G. Foote. Sheed & Ward. $3.

By HELEN C. WHITE

THE significance of this book is revealed in its subtitle, "A Study in Christian Realism." In other words, Mr. Winsnes is trying to define what a very great creative artist was driving at through a long and uncommonly productive writing career. Everything else, background, influences, life patterns, etc., is subordinate and incidental to this exploration and formulation of literary purpose. And since Sigrid Undset early began to move in the direction of her middle-age conversion, and became a profoundly reflective and deliberate and articulate Christian, it is spiritual as well as literary purpose that is involved.

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care to avoid impertinence that should govern any attempt at treatment of the life of the living. And the analysis of the milieu of her mature controversies is of necessity limited to the intersections of her participation. But Mr. Winsnes has set the stage for a good many more detailed and specialized studies of his subject, and defined a context of significance that should help to orient future specialists.

For those of us who first knew Sigrid Undset through her *Kristin Lavransdatter* and were enthralled by the vigorous realism of the surface of her medieval world and the still more massive realism of its underlying psychology, it is illuminating to see that she began her writing with her own immediate world, taking up the issues of the life about her with great directness and candor. It is interesting to see, too, how early in her life the past of her country became a part of her immediate consciousness, another dimension, as it were, of the beloved landscape of her native land. Still more impressive is it to see how early and how surely she went to the heart of the moral issues in the segment of life before her and invested the simplest of human situations with the dignity of universal meaning.

That is the secret of the high degree of relevance that Mr. Winsnes discovers in all her work, a timeliness that extends beyond the twenties and thirties in which her characteristic position was being defined to our own distinctly later day. For whether she was writing of twentieth century or fourteenth century men and women, Sigrid Undset was always writing of the nature and destiny of man, of the dark ways in which he loses himself, of the often darker ways in which he finds and embraces his salvation. And never, even at the most devastating turn of human fortune, is the reader allowed to forget that this is still God's world, lighted with the Divine yearning for its redemption.

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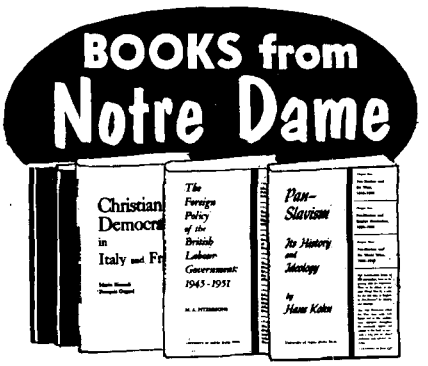

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Interim Struggle

CHILDREN ARE BORED ON SUNDAY. By Jean Stafford. Harcourt. $3.

By JOHN HAY

OUR times are full of obsessions about the unrealized. The impossibility of seeing the future clear leaves the creative interpreter in a deadlock with unreality. The unreal, it is said again and again, is the contemporary condition to which we must be faithful.

Jean Stafford's stories give much evidence of this interim struggle, where the inner world can't come to grips with the outer one. Guilt, isolation—the unreality inside seems to have no way of living with what it imagines to be the brutal unreality beyond it. It is a dramatic and sacrificial struggle and we may have no right to ask that it be resolved in the work of any one writer.

But after reading *Children Are Bored On Sunday* I had the feeling that these stories were stifled, muted, unrealized, by the very effort in which they were conceived. They are very skillfully written. (Miss Stafford's prose is enviable. What other young writer takes as much measured care with the language? She has a kind of gallant eagerness in her work, in her trying to bring the stories into full life.) But the heart is so often stopped in them, the extravagance kicked in the teeth, the main question not answered. Heart, don't cry too hard, they seem to say; the outcome is impossible.

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scalpel bites into her very brain, is in many ways the best of the lot. It is a dead-end story. There is a merciless exposure in it, a ferocity in its description of pain. The self is cornered, brought to the last resort, but will not surrender its integrity. Here the story is a question that gives its own answer.

In many of the other stories the characters are driven to some last ditch isolation, but they can't face it with the same fiery and terrible necessity. Jean Stafford thinks of children perhaps as in some way untouched and inviolable. "A Summer Day" is the story of an Indian boy who is taken to an orphanage which is full of the poison and dread of homelessness, but in his sleep at the end he is himself, "soft and deep and safe." But the self in this book is usually alone and isolated, having no one but some other lonely supernumerary for consolation. And that is no deadlock but a lack of mutual being.

I think Miss Stafford's writing suffers by these impossible attempts. I often wished in reading these stories that the images could come to grips with their own creation, and that the conceptions had some concrete, realizable life to go with, and were not confused by some unnamed guilt. I understood the suspicions, the expectations not fulfilled, the special fantasies that divided Miss Stafford's characters, but I kept wondering why they did not stand up and be recognized, either in the standards of strength or impotence.

But I probably ask too much, and I should be grateful to Jean Stafford for *her* asking.

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COLLECTED POEMS. By Dylan Thomas. New Directions. $3.75.

By DACHINE RAINER

IT is a rare event indeed when the success of a poet exceeds his ambition. In a note to his *Collected Poems* Dylan Thomas says that these poems "are written for the love of Man and in praise of God."

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The third number of *Perspectives USA*, now available in retail stores and by subscription to readers in the United States, has been edited by Jacques Barzun. The following is a partial table of contents:

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Mr. Thomas has certainly written for the love of God, but he has also written in praise of Man.

One is captured in these poems by a lyricism that alternately soothes and disturbs the ear with its subtle and provocative cadences, and one is almost overwhelmed by the richness and abundance of the imagery, but it is not for these qualities alone that Thomas' work is remarkable. His belief in man's dignity and his reverence for the Absolute are marvelous too.

Dylan Thomas continually reminds us that "like a running grave time tracks you down," and that in this short space allotted us we must be intransigent. We must not succumb, he advises in poem after poem, to the pressure of the sham, or even to the terror of the powerful. He believes that the good is obscure: "wise men at their end know dark is right," and he feels that death should catch one at the perpetual moment of opposition, that one is, of necessity, bound to die unfulfilled.

Yet his philosophy is not one of despair. On the contrary, he finds it possible that "Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay." Somehow the joy and intensity of being conscious is more than adequate compensation for the somberness of his vision. In the poem "There was a Saviour," he conveys this rather better than one can in prose:

There was glory to hear
In the churches of his tears.

Thomas' virtues in excess are his failings. His imagery can be too rich, and his concepts, radical and complex as they are, can occasionally be too difficult for an easily daunted reader to unravel. However, in all his poetry, his general excellence provides an aesthetic ballast for the sobriety of his concepts.

It is impossible to estimate the size and scope of Dylan Thomas' influence. He was already a precursor of the now current "romantic rebellion" in English poetry when the major poets of the thirties—Auden, Spender, MacNeice—were having their greatest vogue. When they were realistically opposing the concentration camp order, he, with the

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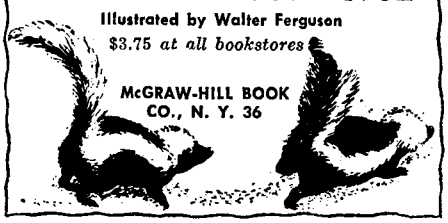

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aid of Welsh folklore, was imaginatively postulating a more desirable, but forever unrealizable world—one peopled with giants and fairies, and proclaiming the joy and magic of the natural order.

Since two of the volumes represented in the *Collected Poems* were previously brought out only in limited editions, this volume ought to make the poetry of Dylan Thomas more available not only to the serious poet, but to a general appreciative audience. For, second only to Yeats and Blake as a radical romantic, Mr. Thomas, who is not yet out of his thirties, is a major force in modern English poetry.

Many Are Called

FEW ARE CHOSEN. By Norma Downey Ferraro. Harper. $3.50.

By SISTER HELEN ANGELA HURLEY

THIS charmingly assembled book is a choice example of the hybrid of literature. It is neither fact nor fiction, neither true nor false. The jacket announces that it is the "true, personal story of a girl who went from an orphanage in Newfoundland to a convent in the United States. She entered the convent when she was fifteen, and, at nineteen, she left the convent, after having taken her first vows, and came back into the world, later to be married." The author's note, however, states that "the characters, places and circumstances in this book are composites. No factual portrayal is intended."

Mrs. Ferraro begins her story in enviable prose at her home in Bell Island, Newfoundland, where her father was a foreman in the iron ore mines, forever plagued about shutdowns. At once we taste the author's acute observation and her facile humor. She relates poignantly the death of her parents when she was twelve. In the family of her uncle, she was unwelcome and unhappy.

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prevention" if he kept the orphan in his home. Whereupon the child spoke up and said she would like to go to the sisters' orphanage because she intended to be a nun. This pathetic bit of pathology pervades the book as if the writing were a psychiatrist's assignment. One can but hope that the writer will feel better now that the exercise is finished.

If her editors had only been wise enough to allow the author to tell her story as her own, however warped the point of view, the book might conceivably have become what the jacket calls "important." On the contrary, their fine hand has steered the story away from the recollections of a poor little girl who lived seven years under her own defective motivation, to a sort of reforming crusade directed at the thousands of convents of stable and sincere women who operate under a system tested by centuries and honored with the strictest remedial legislation in the Church.

Religious women are people of varied dispositions and weaknesses and over a century presumably every human act has been performed by one or the other of them. Among the prevailingly healthy and wholesome, not a thimbleful of eroticism could be gotten up in the last twenty-five years. Mrs. Ferraro's "composites" cram abnormalities together in a quantity that is nothing short of ludicrous. If the things which "the Sisters all thought" and "we were taught"—mostly about marriage and sex—are true, there is no need to write a book about them. The nearest chancery office would supply the most immediate attention. Her "adolescent confusion and deep entanglement with spiritual matters" is the fog which Mrs. Ferraro manages to leave over the "life she lived." Thus she writes of the Irish postulants, "most particularly awesome was their belief in the reality of Hell." The detail that their belief is essential in Catholic teaching is overlooked. And the matter of supplying an undowered novice leaving the convent with travelling expenses and temporary maintenance is specifically and charitably regulated by Canon Law.

Possibly it is a good thing for

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nuns like the present reviewer who are forever charging around convents talking about what ought to be done to be forced to read a book like this. Certainly my companions at table find me very entertaining on the subject of *Few Are Chosen.* They think I am just being funny, especially when I cannot tell them the date nor the order for all the revelations.

The dating is curious. Mrs. Ferraro's terminology for religious exercises and other customs is often archaic when not plain wrong, as a bout with the dictionary will indicate. A usage like "pic-nic" is just too quaint. It occurs only in frontier newspapers of a century ago—certainly not in modern California. However, Mrs. Ferraro's Sisters were chanting the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin in English—recent practice—and the former Sister Monica faced the world in rayon stockings and a dress which hardly reached her knees. A woman beautiful and thirtyish appears in the six by eight photograph of the author.

One may hazard the guess that some intramural recreations will be enlivened by Mrs. Ferraro's account of "the people she associated with in the convent." There will be rollicking additions and subtractions from real life and that is about all the stir her book will cause within the walls. No one will take the trouble to refute the absurdities of *Few Are Chosen,* but there may be some speculation on the adolescence of the publishers and their conception of what is "deeply religious."

REVIEWERS

George Miles has contributed a number of reviews to The Commonweal during recent years. His home is in Kirkwood, Missouri.

Helen C. White, author of *A Watch in the Night, The Metaphysical Poets,* and other books, is a member of the English department at the University of Wisconsin.

John Hay is a poet and literary critic whose home is in Brewster, Massachusetts.

Dachine Rainer is a new contributor.

Sister Helen Angela Hurley is a member of the St. Paul, Minnesota, Province of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

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